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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of varying the content of adults' exhortations about altruism and the power of the preacher on children's subsequent donations. Subjects were 166 third and fourth grade children from two middle class suburban elementary schools. A 2 x 2 x 3 x 2 design was employed with the factors being sex, grade (third and fourth), content of preachings (normative, empathic, neutral control), and power of the preacher (high power (the school principal) versus low power (another school's principal]. Preachings designed to elicit the children's empathy enhanced donations regardless of who the preacher was. Normative exhortations increased giving only when delivered by the principal from the child's own school. Fourth graders donated significantly more than third graders, and girls tended to donate more than did boys. (Author/SB)

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The "Who" and "What" of It: The Effects of Content of Preachings and Power of the Preacher on Children's Sharing

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The "Who" and "What" of It: The Effects of Content of Preachings and Power of the Preacher on Children's Sharing

This study investigated the effects of varying the content of adults' exhortations about altruism and the power of the preacher on children's subsequent donations. One hundred and sixty-six third and fourth graders heard either empathic, normative, or neutral preachings from either a high power exhorter (the principal from their school) or a low power adult (the principal from another school). Preachings designed to elicit the children's empathy enhanced donations regardless of who the preacher was. Normative exhortations increased giving only when delivered by the principal from the child's own school. Furthermore, fourth graders donated significantly more than third graders, and girls tended to donate more than did boys.

Interest in the effect of preachings on children's generosity first developed from research concerned with modeling and altruism (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a, 1970b; Grusec, 1972; Grusec & Skubiski, 1970). This research has consistently indicated that altruistic models evoke similar behavior from observing others; however, the reason for this effect is not clear. One proposed explanation for the tendency of both adults and children to imitate altruistic models is that the action of the model reminds observers of norms concerning the helping of others. Theorists have argued that if this explanation is correct, verbal reminders of the norms of helping should also induce generosity. Thus, research on preachings emerged in an attempt to better understand the phenomenon of imitation by studying verbal reminders of the norms of helping.

Although preachings have often been studied in the context of understanding the phenomenon of imitation, research on the effects of preachings on children's generosity also has significance for the literature on the socialization of moral behavior. Parents undoubtedly enhance or inhibit the development of generosity with a variety of childrearing techniques (Hoffman, 1970b); thus, one might logically expect preachings from adults about altruism to influence children's generosity. However, early research on the effect of preachings (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a, 1970b) suggested

that what adults say about sharing has little effect on children's subsequent altruism. This finding, counterintuitive as it seemed, disturbed some researchers (e.g., Anderson & Perlman, 1973; Rushton, 1975), and evoked further research. Some of this later research produced results contradictory to the findings of Bryan and Walbek, i.e., indicated that preachings could enhance children's generosity. Thus, the present literature on exhortations is inconsistent.

Why is the research on the effects of preachings about sharing contradictory? There are several factors that could account for the differences in experimental findings. First of all, several of the studies which found no clear effects of preachings confounded the effects of modeling and preaching (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a, 1970b; Bryan, Redfield, & Mader, 1971; Liebert & Poulos, 1971). In these studies, the effects of preaching were always assessed in combination with the modeling of generosity or selfishness. Studies that have assessed the effects of preaching independently of modeling (Anderson & Perlman, 1973; Grusec, 1972; Rice & Grusec, 1975) have been more likely to find an effect of exhortations. It is possible that the effects of modeling are so potent that preachings have little additive effect when in combination with modeling.

A second factor which may contribute to the discrepancies in the literature on exhortations is the variation in the

content of preachings. In the early Bryan and Walbek studies that obtained no effect of exhortations (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a, 1970b), the preachings consisted of reminders of the norms of helping, e.g., "You should give to others." The one Bryan study that did find that charitable exhortations increased children's generosity used not only normative exhortations but also preachings which gave reasons for helping that were likely to evoke a sympathetic, empathic response (Midlarsky & Bryan, 1972). The exhortations in this study included statements such as, "I know I don't have to give but it would make some children very happy, wouldn't it?" The finding that these exhortations enhanced children's generosity is consistent with research on moral development suggesting that socializers' inductions (verbal reasoning) which direct the child's attention to others' needs and feelings enhance children's consideration for others and other aspects of moral development (Hoffman, 1970b).

Grusec and her colleagues have employed yet a different kind of verbalization in their research on preaching (Grusec, 1972; Grusec & Skubinski, 1970; Rice & Grusec, 1975). In their studies, the verbalizations were neither normative nor empathic in content, but merely stated what the preacher planned to do, e.g., "Well, I guess they expect us to share our marbles with those poor children. Probably that's what one had better do. I guess if I gave one out of every two

marbles I win to the poor children, that would be fair . . . " (Grusec, 1972). Grusec apparently used this type of preaching in her studies because she was primarily interested in understanding the processes underlying imitation, not the socialization of altruism. Preachings merely stating a proposed course of action are not the kind of exhortations socializers are likely to use when trying to enhance children's moral development; thus, the type of preachings used by Grusec is relatively uninteresting to researchers interested in preachings as a vehicle of socialization.

Power of the preacher is the third variable that differs from study to study. In most research on exhortations, the preacher is a stranger to the child who exerts little control over the child or resources important to the child and is not a legitimate and/or respected authority (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a; Bryan, Redfield, & Mader, 1971; Grusec, 1972; Grusec & Skubiski, 1970; Liebert & Poulos, 1971; Midlarsky & Bryan, 1972; Rice & Grusec, 1975). Such low power preachers are not analagous to socializers who play an important role in the child's life (i.e., control resources over an extended period of time, have an enduring relationship with the child, and are competent and/or respected figures); thus, their preachings should not be expected to have as strong an effect as preachings from a person who is an important and powerful figure in the child's life. However, the few studies that

have used high power preachers have not always found high power preachers to be more effective than low power exhorters in eliciting altruistic behavior. For example, Bryan and Walbek (1970b) found that power of the preacher has no effect on children's generosity; however, the power manipulation in this study was quite weak. The high power preacher was the experimenter, whose power was assumed to derive solely from her implicit control over the child's future rewards in the experimental situation. In the low power condition, the preacher and the experimenter were different people. Since the experimenter was not known to the children and did not explicitly control the child or any desired resources, it is quite possible that the children in this study did not perceive the high power preacher as having any real control over their lives.

Studies that have explicitly assigned power to the model and/or preacher have generally obtained data suggesting that power of an adult is important when that adult is attempting to induce children to share. Grusec (1971) told her subjects that the high power model in her study was someone who controlled the child's receipt of a special prize and found that the high power model elicited more imitation of altruistic behavior than did the low power model. Grusec did not, however, examine the role of power in relation to preachings (the models differed only in behavior, not

verbalizations). Rushton (1975) did study the effects of exhortations from an explicitly high power preacher (a possible future teacher at the subjects' school) and obtained a delayed effect of preachings two months later. Unfortunately, Rushton did not assess the effects of exhortations from a low model adult so it could not be ascertained if the effectiveness of the preachings was due to the preacher's power or some other characteristic of the preacher or the experimental situation.

No studies on altruism have used a preacher (or model, for that matter) that is really a powerful figure in the child's environment, e.g., a parent, teacher, or principal. Such a manipulation would seem to provide a more realistic, accurate assessment of the effect of power of a preacher than has been provided by previous research.

The present study was designed to assess the effectiveness of preachings for enhancing children's anonymous sharing while systematically controlling for some of the factors possibly underlying the discrepancies in the current literature on exhortations. Thus, the differential effectiveness of various types of preachings (normative, empathic, and neutral) was examined independently of the effects of modeling. Furthermore, the variable of power of the preacher was manipulated with the use of real life socializers (the subjects' school principals). Based on the previous research on

preaching (Midlarsky & Bryan, 1972) and the socialization of moral behaviors in general (Dlugokinski & Firestone, 1974; Hoffman, 1963, 1970a, 1970b, 1975; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967), it was hypothesized that empathic preachings should enhance children's generosity regardless of how powerful the preacher is. Since empathic preachings should influence children's generosity by eliciting an internal, sympathetic response, who the external exhorter of empathic preaching is should not be very relevant to the child. Furthermore, since studies using exhortations delivered by low power preachers have generally produced no significant changes in children's generosity (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a, 1970b; Bryan, Redfield, & Mader, 1971), normative preachings delivered by a low power preacher were not expected to increase children's sharing. However, it was hypothesized that normative preachings delivered by a truly high power model should have an effect on subjects' donations, since high power individuals frequently induce more imitation (e.g., Grusec, 1971) than low power models and the child should be less likely to ignore normative statements pointing out societal values verbalized by competent, important socializers who have some control over the child's life and desired resources.

Method

Subjects and Experimenters

The participants in this study were 166 (96 males and

70 females) third and fourth grade children from two adjacent elementary schools in the same middle-class, suburban neighborhood. There were 83 children from each school, 42 third graders and 41 fourth graders.

The experimenters were two females in their twenties.

Design

A 2 X 2 X 3 X 2 design was employed with the factors being sex, grade (third and fourth), content of preachings (normative, empathic, versus neutral control), and power of the preacher (high power versus low power). Sixteen boys and twelve girls, half from each grade and each school, were assigned to the six power by content conditions, with the exception of the two neutral conditions (high power, neutral preachings and low power, neutral preachings) which contained only ten girls rather than twelve girls. This irregularity was due to the dearth of fourth grade girls, particularly at one of the schools where the male to female class ratio was almost 3 to 1. While running the study, several subjects were thrown out and replaced with other children because of unusual behavior, e.g. the children / donated before the experimenter could show the video tape and leave the room.

The subjects in this study believed that they were evaluating a game for the experimenters. When each child arrived at the experimental room, he (or she) was told that he would be shown a film of an adult demonstrating

how to play the game that the child would later play and evaluate. In the video tape the child saw his or her own school principal or the principal from the other school try out the dart game, pick up the 50¢ being paid to all participants, and then verbalize a four sentence utterance.

Power of the preacher was manipulated via which video tape was shown to the child. In the high power condition, the preacher was the child's school principal. In the low power condition, the preacher was the principal from the other school. Thus, each of the two preachers was the high power preacher for half of the subjects and the low power preacher for the other half of the sample (from the other school). This procedure controlled for idiosyncratic characteristics of the preachers that might have either enhanced or inhibited children's sharing.

Content of the preachings was also manipulated via the video tape films. Three tapes were made for each of the two principals. These three tapes were identical in content until the very end when the principal finished playing the game, picked up the 50¢, and uttered in a thoughtful manner either the empathic, normative, or neutral verbalization. All three preachings were very similar in number of words and sentences. After the preacher finished speaking, the video tape blurred abruptly so that the children could not see if the principals actually donated any of their

ten nickels. Thus, the subjects did not observe any modeling of generosity or selfishness.

Procedure

Each subject was sent alone to the experimenter by the child's teacher in roughly alphabetical order. As the subjects arrived, they were assigned to the power by content condition currently being tested. The six video tapes for the six conditions were systematically rotated so that subjects from a single classroom were assigned to different conditions.

When a subject arrived for the experiment, the experimenter took the child into the room where there was a styrofoam ball dart game on one wall and a Unicef collection bowl (containing fifty nickels) next to a poster of poor children across the room. Then the subjects received the following instructions:

"Hello (child's name). My name is _____. As you know, we are asking children from your school to test a toy for us. We want to know how much children your age and adults like this game. Before you try the game, you will see a film of an adult (your principal) play the game to show you how to do it. Then you can try the game and decide how much you like it, Okay?

We have some money that the toy company which asked us to test this toy gave us to help pay for driving back and

forth from hour homes to this school. We won't need as much money as they gave us so we are giving 50¢ to all the children that try this game. We are also collecting money for the poor children in the poster over there so that they can buy food and toys. If you want to give some of your 50¢ to these children, you can put some of the money in this bowl but you don't have to. It's up to you.

Now I'm going to show you the film of an adult (your principal) playing the game that you will try later."

At this time the child was shown the appropriate video tape. In the high power condition the above statement contained the words in the parentheses. The children were told that the 50¢ they were paid was from extra funds (rather than payment for their help) to minimize the effects of deservedness on the children's donation behavior.

After the children viewed the video film, they were given the following instructions:

"Okay. I have to do some work in the other room. Could you please try out this game by yourself for a few minutes and then come tell me how much you like it. I'll be (in the hall). Your 50¢ is here. Please try the game just two or three times. Thanks."

The experimenter then went into the next room and shut the door to the experimental room. Thus, the subjects could play the game and donate as much of their 50¢ (10 nickels)

as they desired anonymously.

The verbalizations of the principals in the video tapes varied with the experimental condition. In the empathic condition, the subjects saw the principal pick up the 50¢ and make the following statements:

> Well now, I think that people should share with the poor children. They would be so happy and excited if they could buy food and toys. After all, poor children have almost nothing. If everyone would help these children maybe they wouldn't look so sad."

In the normative condition, the preachers spoke as follows:

> Well now, I think that people should share with the poor children. It's really good to donate to poor boys and girls. Yes, we should give some money to others poorer than ourselves. Sharing is the right thing to do.

In the neutral, control group, the preachers spoke about the game, not giving:

> I've never seen a toy like that before. It reminds me of a dart game, but different because you use balls. It's not that easy to play it well. You have to aim very carefully and hit the ball just right.

After the subjects had finished playing and donating, the experimenter asked the child various questions about their evaluation of the game. Embedded in these questions were the following two manipulation checks: (1) Did you recognize the woman in the film? and (2) How important is the woman in the television film in your everyday life? If the child did not understand the second question, it

was changed as follows: "How important is the woman in the television film around here?" If the child did not respond in an easily codable manner, he or she was asked if the woman in the film was "not important at all," "a little bit important," "fairly important," or "very important."

Results

Manipulation Checks

Information on recognition and importance of the preacher was obtained for all but three subjects (the experimenters forgot to record the data for these three children).

All of the children in the high power condition reported that they recognized the woman in the video film. All but four third grade children in the low power condition (three males and one female) said that they did not recognize the woman in the film.

All of the children in the high power condition reported that the woman in the film was "important" or "fairly important" in their everyday lives or around the school. All of the children in the low power condition said that the woman was "not important" or only "a little bit important." Some of the children in the low power condition attributed "a little" importance to the woman in the film because she taught the subject how to play the game.

In summary, all of the children in the high power condition reported recognition of the woman in the film and attributed

moderate or high importance to her. The subjects in the low power condition usually did not say that they recognized the woman in the film and did not feel she was very important.

Effects on Generosity

Preliminary comparisons of means indicated that the subjects from the two schools did not differ in their donating behavior. Thus, the subjects from the two schools were combined and a 2 X 2 X 3 X 2 analysis of variance was carried out with the dependent variable being the number of nickels donated by the children.

The mean number of nickels donated by the subjects in the various conditions may be seen in Table 1. The analysis of variance indicated that content of the preachings was a highly significant determinant of children's donations, $F(2, 142) = 4.233$, $p < .016$, with the empathic preachings eliciting the most sharing. Grade also had a significant effect on sharing, with fourth graders giving more than third graders, $F(1, 142) = 4.030$, $p < .047$. Furthermore, girls tended to donate more than boys, $F(1, 142) = 2.925$, $p < .089$. Power had no main effect on donations, $F(1, 142) = 1.020$, $p < .314$. None of the two, three, or four way interactions were significant.

Insert Table 1 about here

To further explore the nature of the effect of content of preaching, Dunnett's tests were computed to compare the

neutral condition (the control group) with the empathic and normative conditions within each of the power conditions (low power and high power). As predicted, in the high power condition both the empathic and normative preachings produced significantly higher donations than did the high power neutral condition ($p < .05$, 1-tailed test). In the low power condition, only the empathic preachings enhanced generosity more than did the neutral preachings ($p < .05$, 1-tailed test).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that preachings about generosity can enhance children's generosity. However, who the preacher is and what the preachings say are important factors influencing the effectiveness of preachings.

Empathic exhortations appear to be a particularly powerful determinent of children's generosity. They enhance children's sharing regardless of how powerful the preacher is. The potency of empathic preachings is consistent with previous research suggesting that verbalizations pointing out the consequences of the child's behavior for others (other-oriented inductions) tap the child's empathic potential and enhance the development of consideration for others and generosity (Dlugokinski & Firestone, 1974; Hoffman, 1963, 1970a, 1970b, 1975; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). The effectiveness of empathic exhortations is also consistent with the research suggesting that empathic responding mediates helping and

sharing behaviors (Aderman & Berkowitz, 1970; Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, Note 1; Krebs, 1975; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972) and that empathic moral reasoning is often used by elementary school children to justify moral judgments favoring an altruistic conflict resolution (name deleted, Note 2). Young children are obviously capable of role taking and empathic responding, and techniques that encourage children to use this potential appear to be powerful tools for the socialization of moral behaviors.

Although elementary school children appear to be aware of norms prescribed helping, they do not seem to be readily motivated to comply with these norms (Bryan & Walbek, 1970a). References to the norms of helping by low power preachers (strangers) do not induce children to be more generous. It appears that children only attend to norms verbalized by a person who plays a significant, high power role in the child's life. But it is not clear why high power preachers' normative exhortations are effective facilitators of children's sharing. Status envy theorists (e.g., Kagan, 1958) assert that children identify with and imitate powerful models because they control valuable resources, while cognitive developmental theorists claim that children are influenced by powerful, competent models because of the desire for effectance (Kohlberg, 1969). Indeed, high power preachers are generally important, competent people

in the child's life, have some control over the child's behavior, and also can distribute desirable resources. Any of these factors alone or in combination could account for the effectiveness of high power preacher's normative verbalizations. Only further research can determine what components of power are instrumental in enhancing both imitation and compliance with normative preachings.

The preachings in this study were presented to the subjects via video tape. However, comparison of studies that use live preachers and filmed preachers (e.g., Rushton, 1975 and Rushton & Owen, 1975) suggests that preachings from a live model are more effective in promoting generosity than exhortations from a preacher on film. Thus, it is likely that both empathic and normative preachings would enhance children's generosity even more than in the present study if presented by a live person. Furthermore, exhortations from socializers more important and powerful than principals, e.g., parents, would probably produce more sharing than obtained in this study.

The finding that older children were more generous than younger children is consistent with much of the research on altruism (see reviews of Bryan, 1975 and Krebs, 1970). Similarly, other studies have also noted the tendency for girls to give more than boys (see Bryan, 1975 and name delted, Note 2), although the literature is not

entirely consistent with regard to sex differences.

The present study raises a variety of issues for further research, including the following: At what age do children have the capacity to respond to empathic preachings? Do normative preachings from low power exhorters become more effective with age as children internalize the norms of helping? What is it about a high power preacher that elicits compliance with preachings -- the preacher's control over the child's resources, his or her competence, or the high power socializer's relationship to the child? Can preachings enhance types of prosocial behavior besides generosity, such as helping in an amergency and the providing of emotional support? The answers to these questions would contribute greatly to our understanding of the socialization of altruistic behavior.

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TABLE 1

Mean Number of Donated Nickels Within Each Treatment Condition

Grade	Sex	Condition[1]					
		HP Empathic	LP Empathic	HP Normative	LP Normative	HP Neutral	LP Neutral
Third	Female	2.667 (N=6)	3.833 (N=6)	2.833 (N=6)	.833 (N=6)	1.667 (N=6)	1.000 (N=6)
	Male	2.750 (N=8)	2.625 (N=8)	2.500 (N=8)	.750 (N=8)	.125 (N=8)	.500 (N=8)
Fourth	Female	2.500 (N=6)	5.000 (N=6)	4.167 (N=6)	3.000 (N=6)	2.400 (N=5)	3.000 (N=5)
	Male	4.125 (N=8)	1.625 (N=8)	2.875 (N=8)	2.000 (N=8)	1.750 (N=8)	1.375 (N=8)
Overall Means		3.072 (N=28)	3.107 (N=28)	3.036 (N=28)	1.607 (N=28)	1.370 (N=28)	1.333 (N=28)

[1]HP = high power; LP = low power